Expanded Definition of Student Success
Ed Tech Challenge
Reflections on the Applicant Pool

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Table of Contents

Introduction

About this analysis

What this is

In 2019, NewSchools Venture Fund launched the [Expanded Definition of Student Success (EDSS) Ed Tech Challenge](#), open to entrepreneurs developing technology-enabled solutions to enhance academic and social-emotional learning while supporting the development of nurturing school and classroom environments. A record 192 applicants applied. This deck analyzes the applicant pool and offers a unique perspective on the approaches, challenges and opportunities of the current landscape of ed tech solutions supporting an expanded definition of student success.

What this is not

This analysis focuses specifically on ed tech's intersection with the EDSS space and is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the EDSS landscape. We also acknowledge the limitations of this analysis. Data was self-reported by challenge applicants. The definitions and coding of ventures were aligned to NewSchools' definition of EDSS work. Despite imperfect conditions, we believe the conclusions drawn from this analysis can be informative for educators, entrepreneurs, and funders seeking to better understand and impact this space.

About NewSchools Venture Fund

NewSchools Venture Fund is a nonprofit venture philanthropy that invests in promising teams of educators and innovators with the vision and skills to reimagine learning. We help them accomplish their missions to achieve outstanding results for the students, educators and schools they serve. We are committed to helping students finish high school prepared and inspired to achieve their most ambitious dreams and plans. Through our investing, management assistance, network building and thought leadership, NewSchools helps to reimagine PreK-12 education.

NewSchools' Investment Areas

INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Invest **nationally in innovative public schools** by supporting the launch of new schools & redesign of existing ones

ED TECH
Increase the **availability & effectiveness of ed tech products** that deepen and enrich student learning

DIVERSE LEADERS
Fund organizations that **diversify education leadership** to bring more innovative, effective, sustainable solutions to the field

OUR CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES
Build pipelines of promising, diverse entrepreneurs.
Fund teams with the highest potential for success.
Provide management assistance to entrepreneurs.
Create and support active communities of practice among them.
Share our learning broadly through thought leadership.

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Our approach to education technology

We are focused on education technology that increases the availability and effectiveness of products that deepen and enrich student learning.

Our goal is to catalyze product growth in areas that educators and students identify as important, but where innovation is lagging.

To achieve our goal, we:

▶ **Identify market gaps** in which education technology is not meeting the critical needs of educators and students

▶ **Mobilize entrepreneurs** through Ignite Challenges, providing funding, management assistance, research partnership, and collective learning opportunities

▶ **Share** our lessons with the broader education community to support more comprehensive and wide-scale impact

About the *Expanded Definition of Student Success Ed Tech Challenge*

In February 2019, NewSchools' Ed Tech team launched its seventh ed tech challenge, the Expanded Definition of Student Success Challenge – open to entrepreneurs developing technology-enabled learning experiences, instructional content, learning diagnostics, administrative tools, and other products that promote an expanded definition of student success by enhancing academic and social-emotional learning and supporting the development of nurturing school and classroom environments.

We conducted market research – with students, educators, and researchers from across the country – to learn more about how technology might support an expanded definition of student success. Research suggests the most promising ed tech innovations will support the development of a range of social-emotional competencies, cognitive skills, and attributes of positive learning environments. We expect challenge winners will address one or more critical area of student need:

- Promoting school readiness and skills that enable successful school transitions;
- Integrating social-emotional development into core academic learning;
- Enabling new ways to measure and analyze an expanded set of student outcomes; and
- Building teachers', parents', and communities' capacity to support an expanded definition of student success.

The numbers behind the *Expanded Definition of Student Success Ed Tech Challenge*

192

applications

11

ventures selected for funding

$1.5M

in non-dilutive funding issued

$500K

in additional funds
ear-marked for research

Applicant Pool Themes

A diverse and do-it-all approach in an environment with little consensus

"Yes, And" Products	Most products were positioned as having applicability to multiple subject areas and school settings. This ability for products to be malleable in focus and implementation could be viewed as a necessity of the loosely-defined EDSS space, but it also creates a barrier to determining true product-market fit as well as building out a sustainable customer success practice.
Tech Second	Most ventures had strong EDSS practitioners at the executive level, many of whom were seeking to transition in-person service delivery to technology-enabled scale. This correlated with weaker expertise in technical and sales/marketing functions, often resulting in less proprietary technology and the incorporation of off-the-shelf software to support distribution and scaling of content.
Nonprofit Strength	There was an increase in the proportion of nonprofits in the applicant pool (31%) and the final cohort (45%) relative to past challenges (average of 20%). Nonprofit providers tended to have been involved in the space longer (average age of 12 years vs. 5 years for for-profit ventures).
Siloed Programs & Assessments	Ventures were vocal in their desire for partnerships. Assessment providers demonstrated appetite for partnership with curricula/intervention program providers and vice-versa. Both parties saw in each other opportunity to validate their offerings and enhance retention.

Examples of the three primary product segments that emerged

Standalone

The primary focus is to support EDSS. These solutions are typically implemented as standalone or as supplemental to core academic instruction.

Move This World is a curriculum and lesson plan platform featuring SEL-aligned, movement-based videos that enable PreK-12 teachers and students to engage with SEL topics as part of their daily classroom routine.

Academic-Integration

The primary focus is to support core academic instruction. These solutions typically position EDSS outcomes as an additional benefit of their offering.

Amira Learning offers an AI-driven reading program. Its personalized support is designed to help children develop mindsets, habits, and skills that support reading mastery and that are linked to long-term success (e.g., sense of purpose, belonging, and growth mindset).

Assessment

The primary focus is to assess EDSS indicators in schools and/or individuals. These solutions are typically implemented biannually and are often accompanied by additional support services.

ACT's Tessera is a comprehensive social and emotional skills formative assessment tool. Tessera's student assessments yield personalized reports which provide next steps for skill development.

Focus Areas

How the applicants were categorized

Ventures were coded by NSVF as having a **Main Focus** and, when applicable, a **Complementary Focus**
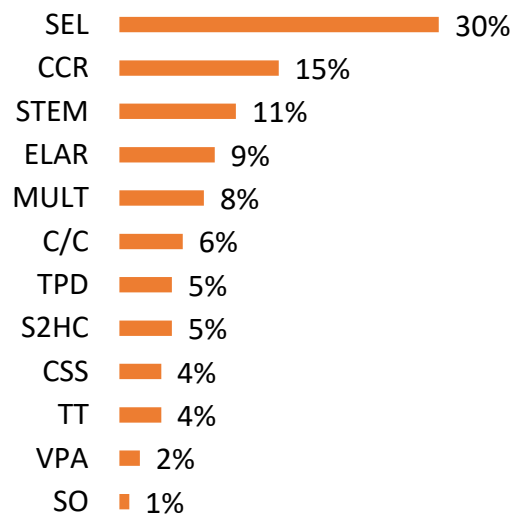
- Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
- College & Career Readiness (CCR)
- Culture & Climate (C/C)
- Multiple Subjects (MULT)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math (STEM)
- English Language Arts & Reading (ELAR)

- School-to-Home Connection (S2HC)
- Teacher PD (TPD)
- Teacher Tools (TT)
- Civics/Social Studies (CSS)
- School Operations (SO)
- Visual & Performing Arts (VPA)

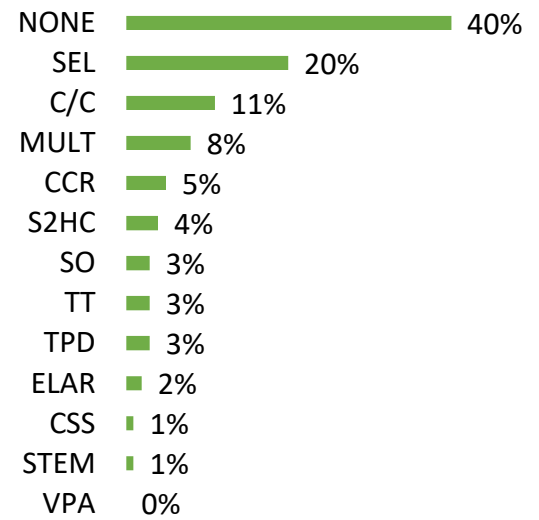# While many solutions serve multiple focus areas, a significant proportion are standalone

Legend

- Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
- College & Career Readiness (CCR)
- Culture & Climate (C/C)
- Multiple Subjects (MULT)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math (STEM)
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Main Focus

Focus	%
SEL	30%
CCR	15%
STEM	11%
ELAR	9%
MULT	8%
C/C	6%
TPD	5%
S2HC	5%
CSS	4%
TT	4%
VPA	2%
SO	1%

Complementary Focus

Focus	%
NONE	40%
SEL	20%
C/C	11%
MULT	8%
CCR	5%
S2HC	4%
SO	3%
TT	3%
TPD	3%
ELAR	2%
CSS	1%
STEM	1%
VPA	0%

Key Takeaways

SEL was the dominant focus area, appearing as a main or complementary focus area for 50% of ventures, followed by CCR (20%) and C/C (17%)

Dependencies across focus areas vary

Social Emotional Learning-Focused Solutions

26% are standalone

Pairings

C/C	19%
ELAR	14%
CCR	10%
MULT	9%
TPD	6%
STEM	6%
S2HC	4%
CSS	3%
VPA	1%
TT	1%
SO	0%
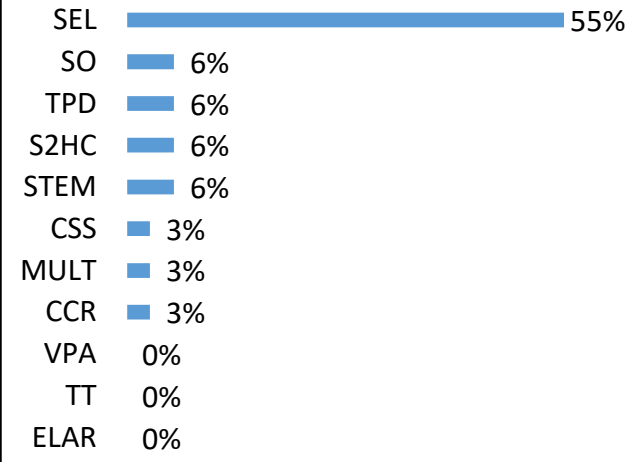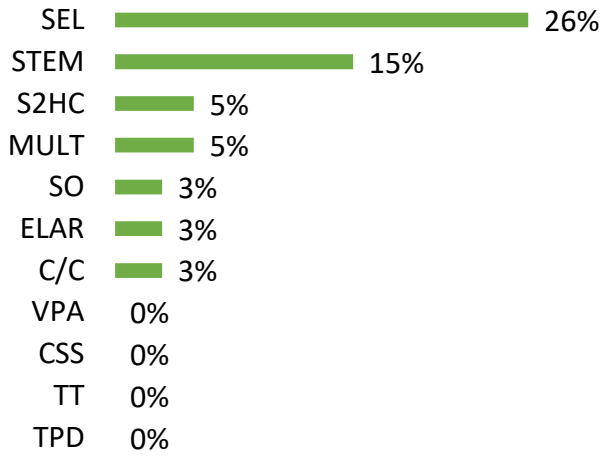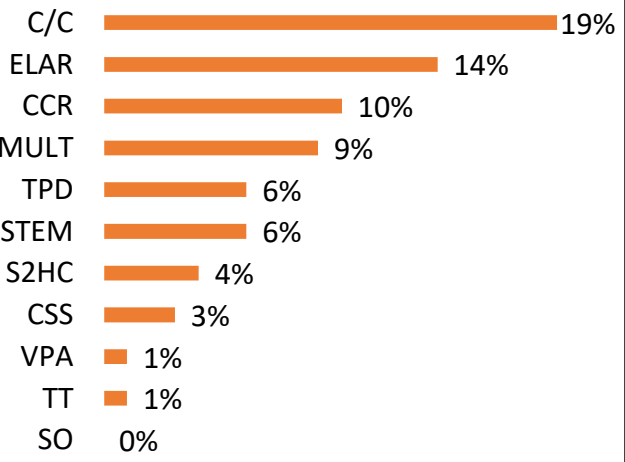
Key Takeaway

While many SEL solutions are offered as standalone, a third are paired with core academic offerings

College & Career Readiness-Focused Solutions

41% are standalone

Pairings

SEL	26%
STEM	15%
S2HC	5%
MULT	5%
SO	3%
ELAR	3%
C/C	3%
VPA	0%
CSS	0%
TT	0%
TPD	0%

Key Takeaway

CCR solutions' prominent pairing with SEL reflects the trend of employer demand for soft skills

Culture & Climate-Focused Solutions

12% are standalone

Pairings

SEL	55%
SO	6%
TPD	6%
S2HC	6%
STEM	6%
CSS	3%
MULT	3%
CCR	3%
VPA	0%
TT	0%
ELAR	0%

Key Takeaway

C/C solutions are rarely offered as standalone offerings; the majority include SEL support

Mapping ventures to the EDSS indicators that NSVF tracks within its portfolio of schools

NSVF partnered with Transforming Education to select a set of indicators our portfolio of innovative public schools could collectively focus on, so that they and we could develop a deeper understanding of how to effectively help students develop along a broader set of academic and social-emotional competencies.

We used the "Three M" framework to identify indicators that are Meaningful, Measurable, and Malleable. ***In their application the EDSS Ed Tech Challenge, ventures could select all that applied to their work.***

Shared mindsets, habits and skills
(Social-emotional competencies)
- Growth mindset
- Intellectual curiosity
- Perseverance
- Self-awareness
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation
- Social awareness

Attributes of a positive learning environment
(School culture/climate factors)
- Cultural and linguistic competence
- Learning strategies
- Rigorous expectations
- School safety
- Sense of belonging
- Student engagement
- Teacher-student relationships

Most ventures align themselves to multiple attributes within the NSVF EDSS framework

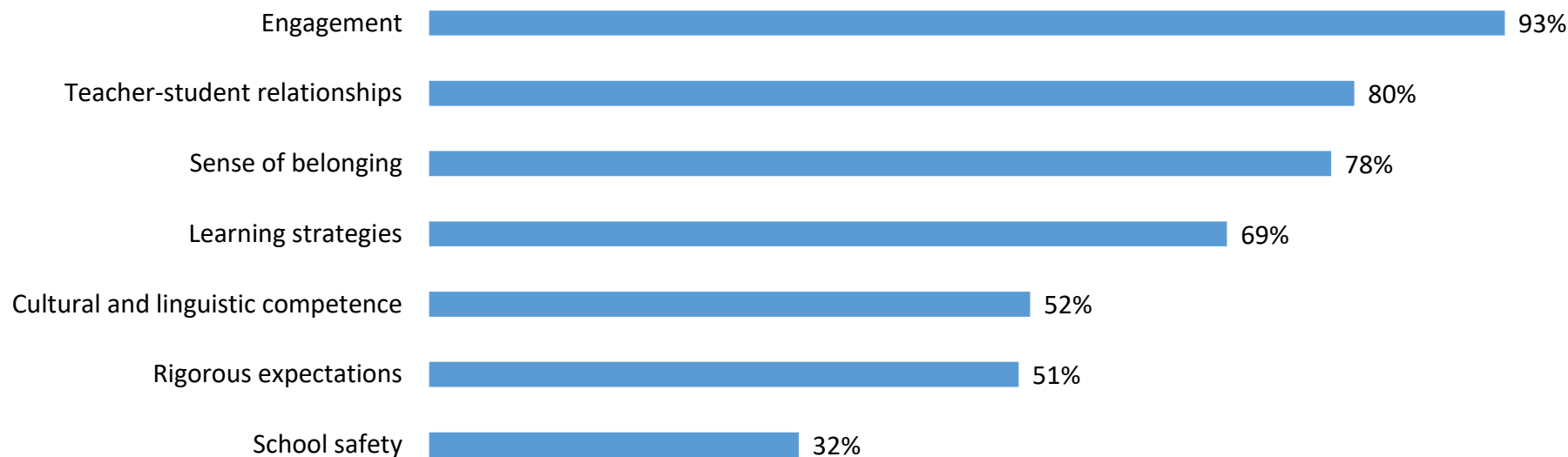## % of Ventures Aligned to Shared Mindsets, Habits, & Skills

Attribute	%
Self-awareness	89%
Social awareness/social competence	88%
Growth mindset	88%
Perseverence	85%
Self-efficacy	83%
Curiosity	78%
Self-regulation	76%
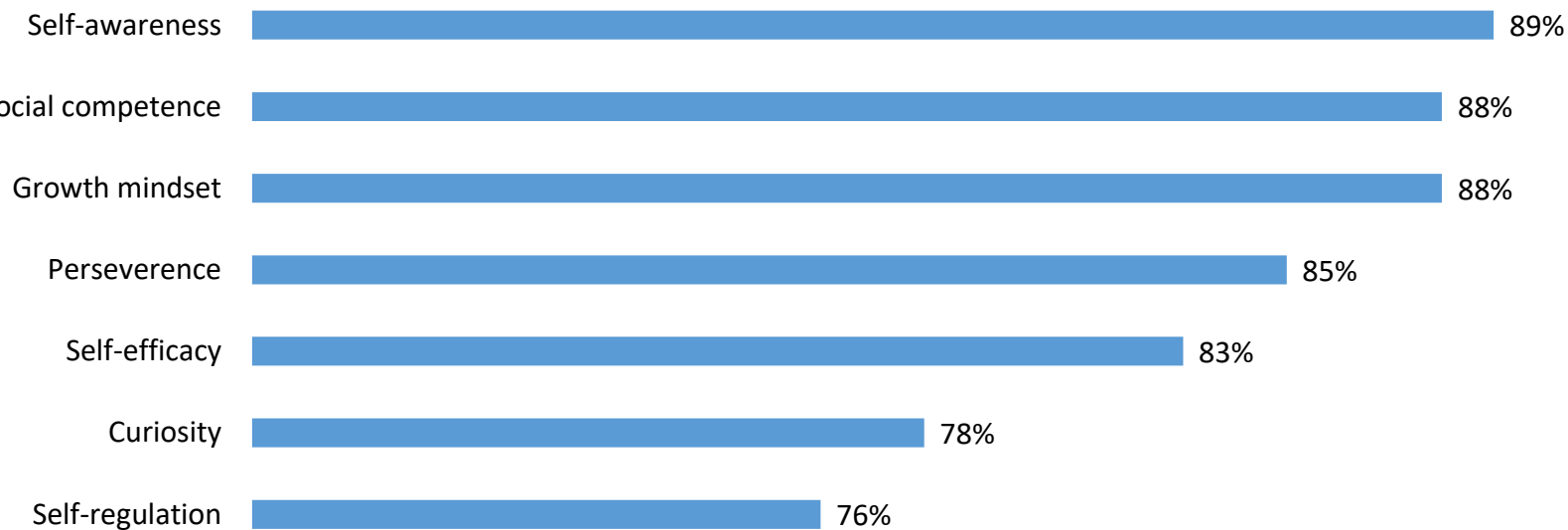
Key Takeaway
- The majority of ventures were aligned with each of NewSchools' seven social-emotional competencies, a potential reflection of the holistic (and "Yes, And") approach that many take to supporting an expanded definition of student success.

"School safety" was not an explicit focus for most ventures

% of Ventures Aligned to Attributes of a Positive Learning Environment

Attribute	%
Engagement	93%
Teacher-student relationships	80%
Sense of belonging	78%
Learning strategies	69%
Cultural and linguistic competence	52%
Rigorous expectations	51%
School safety	32%

Key Takeaway

- Through two years of study with our Innovative Public Schools portfolio, NewSchools found perception of "school safety" to be one of the attributes most strongly associated with academic performance. Should we be encouraging more ventures to address "school safety?" In further exploration of this question, it will be important to clarify for respondents what falls under the school safety umbrella and to define whether a venture is engaging in it directly vs. indirectly.

Venture Profile

Most ventures are established organizations seeking to enter the EDSS space

7 years

The average age of a **venture**

2 years

The average age of a venture's EDSS **product**

Key Takeaway

Most EDSS products were new products from established ventures, a potential indicator of the increasing popularity of the space and opportunity for sales.

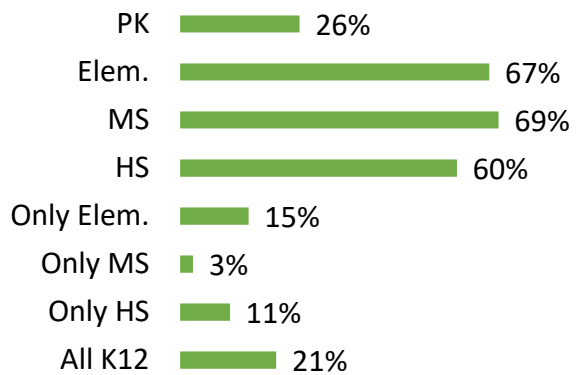# Most ventures set out to serve multiple users, grade levels, and settings
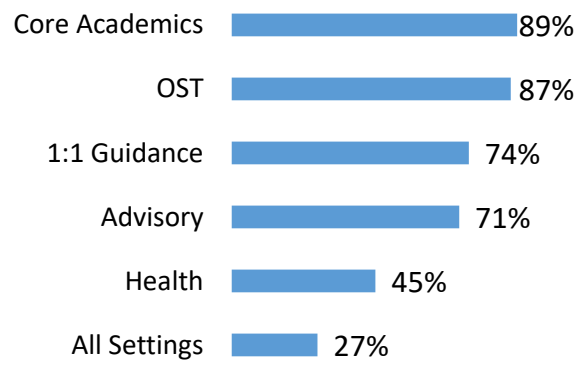
Target Users

Primary Users Served

User	Percentage
Teachers	80%
Students	80%
Parents	36%
Only Students	15%
Only Teachers	13%
Only Parents	2%

Key Takeaway
Many solutions are designed to also engage parents, a potential signifier of the more personal nature of these products
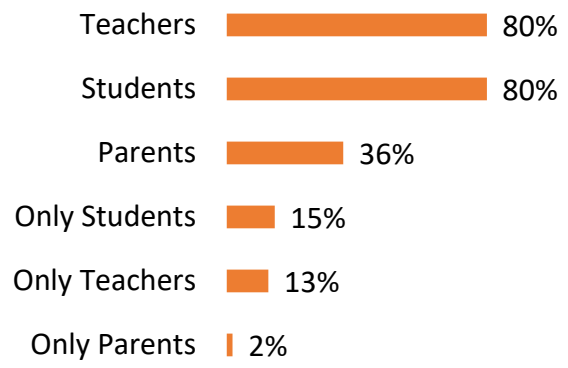
Target Grade Levels

Grade Bands Served

Grade Band	Percentage
PK	26%
Elem.	67%
MS	69%
HS	60%
Only Elem.	15%
Only MS	3%
Only HS	11%
All K12	21%

Key Takeaway
Most solutions serve at least two grade bands, with MS as the most common given its frequent packaging with Elementary- or HS-focused products

Target Settings

Implementation Settings

Setting	Percentage
Core Academics	89%
OST	87%
1:1 Guidance	74%
Advisory	71%
Health	45%
All Settings	27%

Key Takeaway
At present, most solutions are flexible in how and where they can be implemented within the school day – only 5% of solutions were designated for one setting

For most ventures, scale is elusive

Funding	Revenue	Users	Organization Size
57% raised <$500K	**58% make <$10K monthly**	**>Half serve <1K students**	**81% have <10 employees**

Total Capital Raised

$0-1K	18%
$1K-10K	2%
$10K-100K	16%
$100K-500K	21%
$500K-1M	6%
$1M-10M	30%
$10M+	7%

Monthly Revenue

$0-1K	40%
$1K-10K	18%
$10K-100K	30%
$100K-500K	8%
$500K+	4%

EDSS Product Student Users

0-1K	66%
1K-5K	11%
5K-10K	4%
10K-100K	15%
100K-1M	3%
1M+	1%

Organization Size

0-2	57%
3-10	24%
11-50	13%
51-100	1%
101+	5%

Key Takeaway
The majority of ventures are pre-Seed and early in product development. Median funding raised is $328,500 and median runway is 7 months.

Key Takeaway
Most ventures have not yet identified or validated a sustainable revenue model and are struggling to convert whole school sales. Median monthly revenue is $5,850.

Key Takeaway
Most ventures' difficulties to convert whole school sales has resulted in lesser reach in terms of student users. Median student user count is 515 students.

Key Takeaway
Most ventures are struggling to bring on >1 employee, often due to financing issues related to their inability to scale.

EDSS ventures raise more capital and face significant growth challenges than other NewSchools' ventures

Fewer Users

<1000 student users

NSVF Applicant Pool Average — 50%

EDSS Applicant Pool — 66%

Fewer FTEs

0-2 full-time employees

NSVF Applicant Pool Average — 37%

EDSS Applicant Pool — 57%

Less Revenue

Average monthly revenue

NSVF Applicant Pool Average — $119,000

EDSS Applicant Pool — $92,000

More Capital

Average total capital raised

NSVF Applicant Pool Average — $4,600,000

EDSS Applicant Pool — $6,000,000

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Dominant business strategies reflect the broader transition away from Freemium

Venture GTM Strategies

Schools/Institutions	94%
Direct-to-Teachers	48%
OST	43%
Direct-to-Parents	31%
Direct-to-Students	26%

Venture Pricing Models

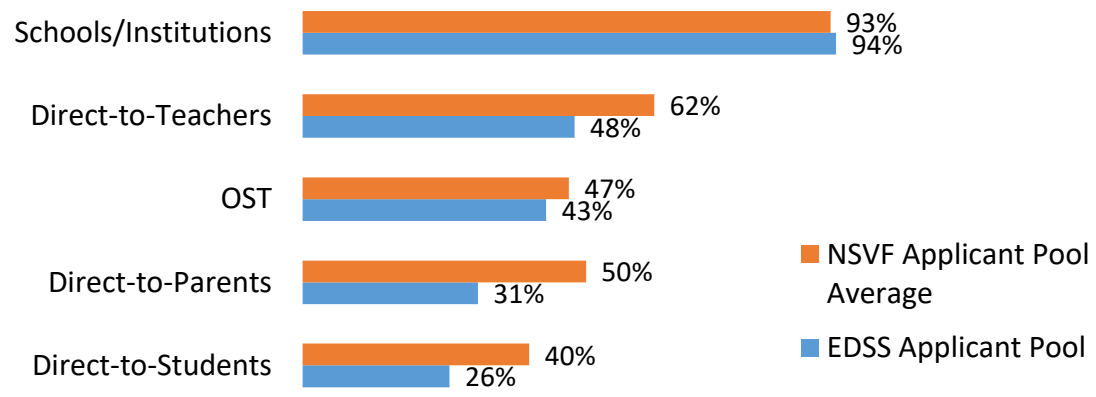|	
Subscription	76%
One-Time Payment	25%
Free	24%
Freemium	20%
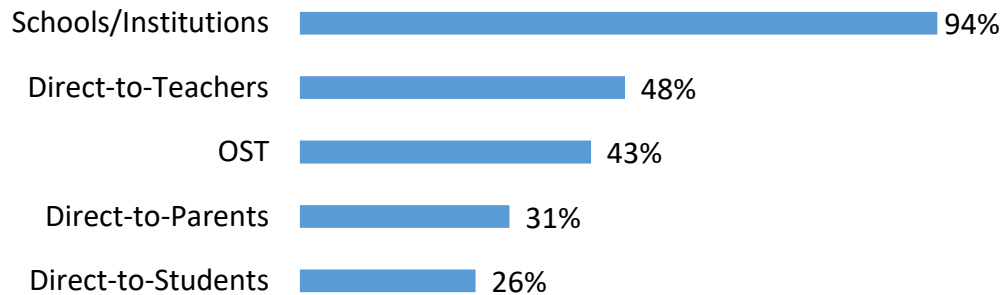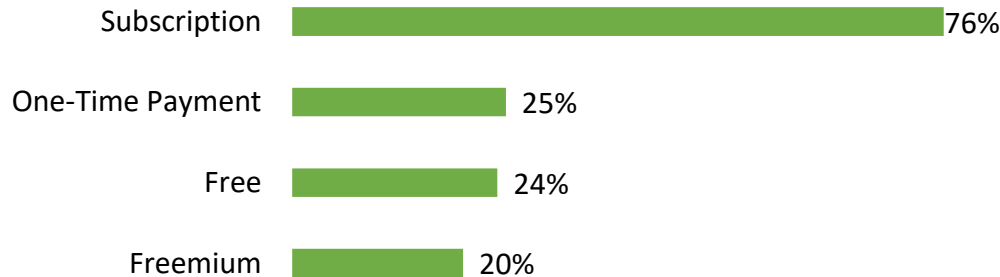
Key Takeaways
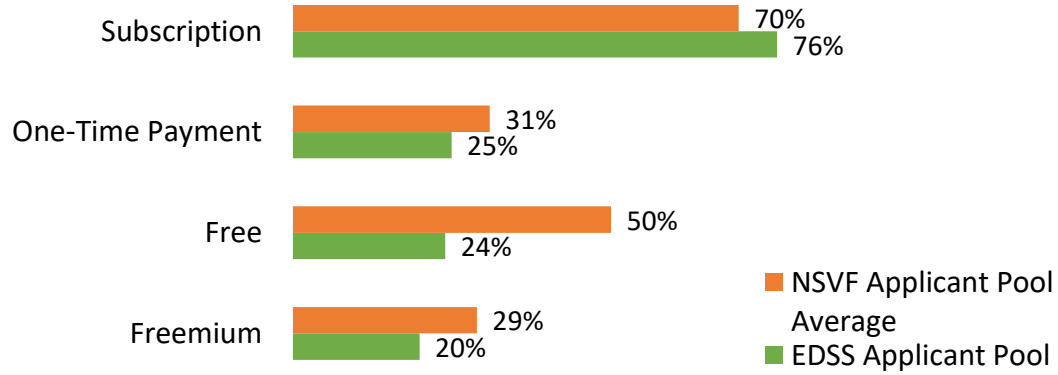
- Most ventures are leveraging institutional, subscription-based sales models – an indicator of the schoolwide nature of many solutions in the EDSS space.
- In line with broader trends, Freemium is no longer considered a viable revenue model. Indeed, only 26% of Subscription-based models rely upon Free or Freemium entry points.
- Of note: zero ventures exclusively targeted OST.

EDSS ventures are more reliant upon institutional and paid sales strategies than past applicants

Venture GTM Strategies

Strategy	NSVF Applicant Pool Average	EDSS Applicant Pool
Schools/Institutions	93%	94%
Direct-to-Teachers	62%	48%
OST	47%	43%
Direct-to-Parents	50%	31%
Direct-to-Students	40%	26%

Venture Pricing Models

Model	NSVF Applicant Pool Average	EDSS Applicant Pool
Subscription	70%	76%
One-Time Payment	31%	25%
Free	50%	24%
Freemium	29%	20%

Key Takeaways

- EDSS ventures were less likely to directly target teachers, parents, and students than previous applicants to NSVF's Ed Tech Challenges. The schoolwide nature of many of these solutions is one possible explanation for this difference.

- NSVF began facilitating Ed Tech Challenges in 2015. The stark drop in the offering of "free" products when comparing EDSS ventures against the total NSVF applicant pool average is a good reflection of the market's transition over the past five years.

Research Profile

Most ventures have limited foundational research

44%

of ventures
completed a
Logic Model

29%

of ventures
completed a
Usability Study

16%

of ventures
completed a
Feasibility Study

The Most Popular Research Frameworks?
- 26% of ventures cited CASEL
- 2% of ventures cited Character Lab
- 1% of ventures cited Young Adult Success

External research is limited and almost always funded by philanthropy or academia

% Ventures That Have Engaged an External Researcher

21%

79%
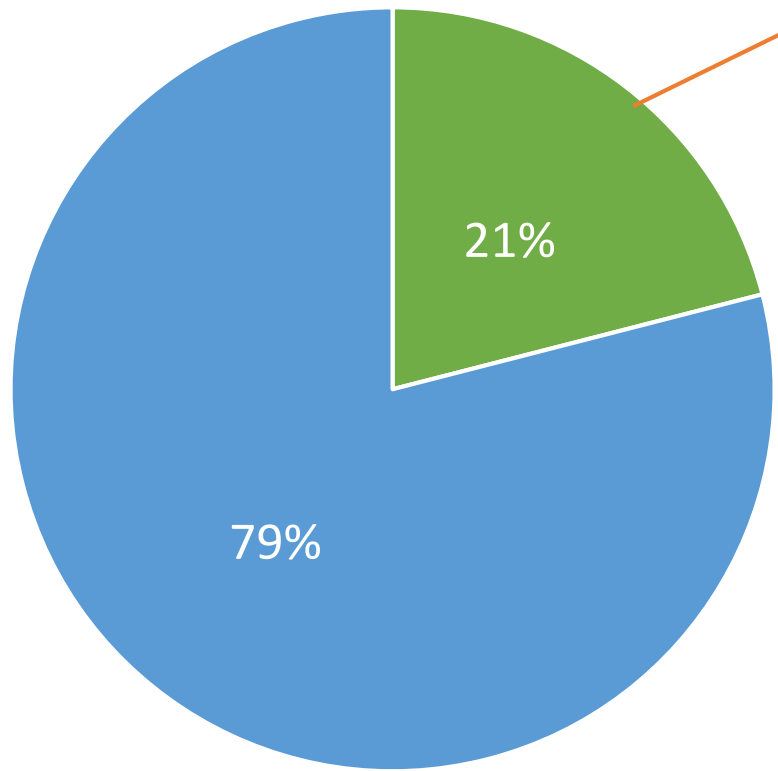
■ Yes   ■ No

Top 3 External Study Types

- **Pre/Post (39%)**
  - *38% funded by philanthropic grants*
  - *25% funded by universities*
  - *19% self-funded*
- **Quasi-Experimental (29%)**
  - *50% self-funded*
  - *17% funded by philanthropic grants*
  - *17% funded by universities*
- **Random Assignment (10%)**
  - *75% funded by philanthropic grants*
  - *25% funded by universities*

To Note: Putting the cart before the horse?
71% of ventures that engaged an external researcher had not yet completed a feasibility study.

Diversity Profile

Employee demographic diversity is better than industry averages

22%

of ventures had at least one African American and/or Hispanic/Latino founder

25%

was the average proportion of African American and/or Hispanic/Latino full-time employees in ventures with a full-time staff

59%

of ventures had at least one female founder

For Reference:
Only 1% of VC-backed early-stage tech companies have African American founders. Data for Hispanic/Latino founders is not available.

For Reference:
African Americans make up only 7.9% of the tech workforce, while Hispanics/Latinos make up only 6.8%.

**For Reference**:
A 2017 study found that only 17% of startups have a female founder.

*Employee demographic diversity within EDSS ventures was similar to that of past Ed Tech Challenge applicants. NSVF seeks teams that embrace a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by developing comprehensive strategies to prioritize DEI in their organizations. This intention's effect upon NSVF's pipeline-building efforts may contribute to a more diverse applicant pool than industry averages.

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Geographic diversity is potentially spurred by the localized nature of EDSS

Geographic Distribution of the U.S. Applicant Pool
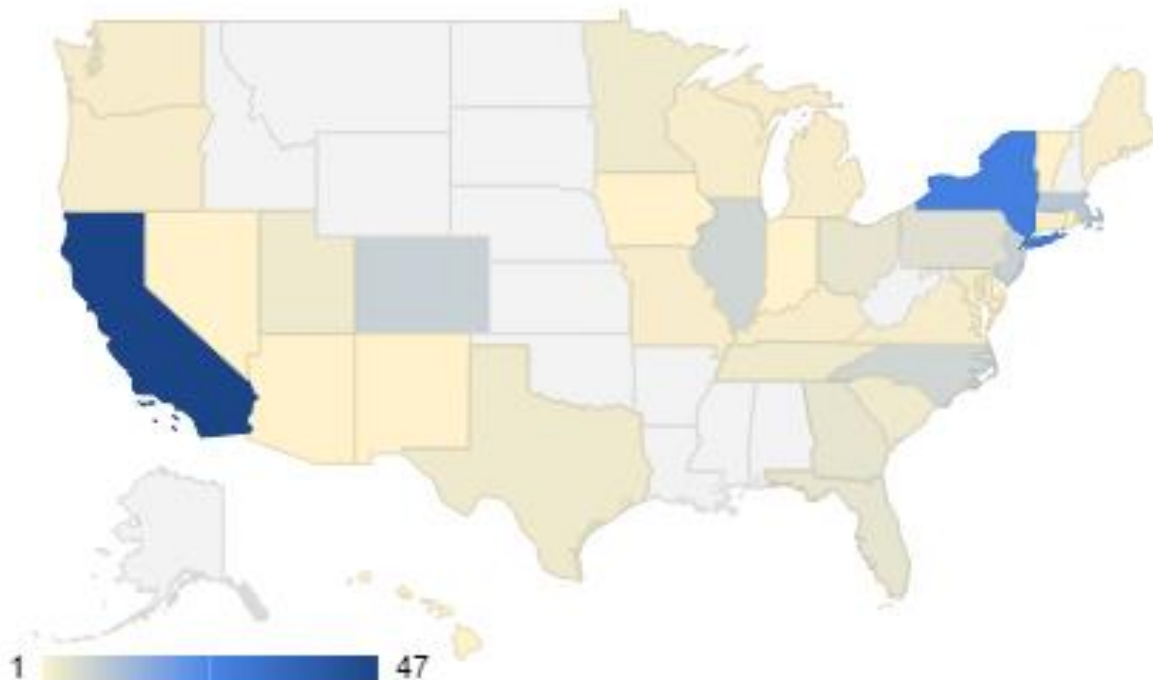
Key Takeaways

The EDSS applicant pool was more geographically diverse than past challenges, potentially representing the bottom-up and more localized nature of solutions in this space.

- *36 states and 6 countries were represented in the applicant pool.*
- *California accounted for one quarter of applications.*
- *Countries represented included: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, U.K., and U.S.*

Thank You

Additional Resources

- The EDSS Ed Tech Challenge Website

- The EDSS Ed Tech Challenge Announcement

- The EDSS Ed Tech Challenge Winner Announcement

- Insight Brief: Embracing and Measuring an Expanded Definition of Student Success

- Insight Brief: Using Expanded Measures of Student Success for School Improvement

- Insight Brief: What We're Learning From Our Investments in Ed Tech

- Is My Ed Tech Tool Making a Difference? An Entrepreneur's Guide to Using Research to Improve Products and Measure Impact.

- The NewSchools-Gallup Survey on Education Technology Use in Schools

- Making Meaning of The NewSchools-Gallup Survey of Educator & Student Perceptions of Ed Tech